

## LATER SCHOOL START TIMES: FACT OR FICTION

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- **Fact or fiction:** Sleep deprivation has been linked to higher rates for obesity, car accidents, and depression.

**FACT.** Studies show an increased likelihood of obesity, sleep-related car accidents, and reported depression in adolescents suffering from sleep deprivation. According to the National Sleep Foundation, adolescents require 9 to 10 hours each night. But few adolescents sleep that much due to their daily school routines. There are serious consequences for the health, safety, social behavior, and academic achievement of the adolescents suffering from sleep deprivation.

- **Fact or fiction:** Heavy costs will be incurred by school districts to push back school start times.

**FICTION.** As a former school administrator, I understand the difficulties faced by school districts to implement new initiatives, especially with tight budgets. However, some school districts have pushed back school start times at little or no cost.

- **Fact or fiction:** There is little or no benefit to later school start times, as students will stay up later and not get additional nighttime sleep.

**FICTION.** After the Minneapolis Public School District changed the starting times of seven high schools from 7:15 a.m. to 8:40 a.m., I studied the sleep habits of students and found that this did not happen. Students continued to go to bed at the same time and therefore slept about an hour more each school night than their peers whose school began at 7:30 a.m.

- **Fact or fiction:** Later school start times are great, but it will adversely impact after school activities, like sports.

**FICTION.** It's true that if school starts later, it will end later. However, schools which have gone to a later start have simply started activities and practices immediately after school dismissal. They have found no decrease in participation and no negative effects on the win/loss rate. Students are arriving home, on average about 20 minutes later, but still in time for dinner and homework. In addition, research shows that most juvenile violent crime occurs between the hours of 2:00 and 4:00 p.m., when adolescents are more likely to be unsupervised if their school dismissal time is early.

- **Fact or fiction:** Daytime sleepiness is biological, not psychological or behavioral.

**FACT.** Melatonin secretion (a key activator of sleep) levels off at approximately 8:00 a.m. By the time of 8:30 a.m., adolescents are alert and ready to learn. We know that the later sleep and wake patterns for adolescents are based in human biology and are highly change-resistant.

For a copy of "Changing Times: Findings From the First Longitudinal Study of Later High School Start Times" (*Bulletin*, National Association of Secondary School Principals, December 2002, Vol. 86 No. 633, pp. 3-21), please visit [http://www.principals.org/news/bltn\\_chngtimes\\_1202.html](http://www.principals.org/news/bltn_chngtimes_1202.html).